

# SOCIOLOGY

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Title: **Interpretive Impacts from the Participants' Perspectives**

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Objectives: The proposed study will investigate the nature and meaning of meaningful interpretive experiences by analyzing subjective accounts of recollected meaningful interpretive programs collected from visitors to two nationally significant interpretive sites. Studying the most meaningful interpretive encounters will provide insight into interpretation at its best for the participants. Based on the accounts of the informants in this study, a model of the elements of meaningful interpretive experiences will be developed which can be used to inform the creation and evaluation of interpretive programs.

Findings: Data collection for this study is still in the pilot testing phase. As of February 10, 1999, there have been no findings. A sample of visitors to Yellowstone National Park will be obtained during the summer of 1999.

Title: **Close Encounters: Factors Affecting whether People Approach Animals Closely in a National Park**

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Objectives: The goal was to observe and videotape visitors who were observing large mammals so as to provide data about behavior in crowds to compare with similar observations at Yellowstone National Park in previous years. The larger study of which this work is a part is designed to explore regularities in human behavior in "animal jams," with a particular focus on social influence processes in crowd settings.

Findings: Observations and videotaping were carried out during several periods from late July to early September 1997. Work focused in particular on visitors observing male elk near Canyon Village. These were the same elk and the same locations that had given rise to rich observations in the 1996 season. Observations and videotaping were carried out during several periods from early to late July 1998. Work focused in particular on visitors observing animals near Seven Mile Bridge.

Consistent with earlier findings, the attractiveness of the animals, physical features in the immediate setting, and the behaviors of other people who were present contributed to the likelihood of people getting close to the animals. Study of the apparent effects of modeling is underway. The hypothesis is that the presence of a similar other person near an animal will increase the likelihood of close approach by a person or group newly arriving on the scene.

Title: **People and Nature: Yellowstone as Landscape**

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Objectives: The objective of this research is to undertake a systematic and comprehensive study of the people who visit, work, and reside in Yellowstone National Park. The research will focus on the cultural context in which Yellowstone is experienced and talked about. Past cultural contexts will be seen in historical data, and present cultural context will be discovered with empirical methods. Forecasting future cultural contexts of values that will affect Yellowstone is another objective.

Findings: This research is ongoing.

Title: **Pilgrims and Rituals in Yellowstone National Park: Touristic Encounters with the Sacred**

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Additional Investigator: Laurence Carucci

Objectives: Examine the relationships between visitors and perceptions of wilderness/nature as inculcated in Yellowstone National Park

Findings: Research is ongoing – 26 interviews with YNP visitors have been conducted to date and are in the process of being transcribed. Over 1,500 images of tourists have been obtained – mostly at Old Faithful. More than two hundred workprints have been produced. Several additional interviews and the photographic project will continue through the 1999 field season.